BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Alex Ruiz

"When I first came here, (laughs), I came under contract, see. I promised my mother after the contract, I'd come back. . . . It was three years, three-year contract. Then you get a free passage [back to the Philippines]. Come three years, my mother write to me, 'When you coming home?' I said, 'Oh, just a little more.' (Laughs) Keep on going on like that until today. I never did go back."

The second of ten children, Alex Ruiz was born July 17, 1914 in Laoag, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. As an infant, he moved with his parents, Antonio and Rufena Ruiz, to Manila, where Antonio worked as a cook. Ten years later, the family moved back to Laoag, where Alex continued his schooling.

In 1930, at the age of sixteen, Alex decided to immigrate to Hawai'i. He did kālai at Kōloa Plantation, then transferred to Kōloa Sugar Mill, where he worked in the laboratory. Alex lived in bachelors' barracks in Kōloa's Filipino Camp.

In 1933, Alex transferred to Kōloa Plantation Store and worked as an order taker and delivery boy. After a stint in the U. S. Army during World War II, he returned to the store. Alex remained there until the late 1950s, when he returned to work in the mill, first as a steam generator operator and later as a journeyman welder.

Retired since 1973, Alex lives in Kōloa with his wife, Janet Fukumoto Ruiz. They have two children and four grandchildren.

Tape No. 15-38-1-87

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Alex Ruiz (AR)

June 3, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN) and Chris Planas (CP)

WN: This is an interview with Alex Ruiz on June 3, 1987 at his home in Kōloa. The interviewers are Chris Planas and Warren Nishimoto.

CP: I guess the first thing to start is your date of birth and where you were born.

AR: Well, (laughs) I was born in the city of Laoag, Ilocos Norte.

CP: And what was your birth date?

AR: July 17.

CP: July 17, 1914?

AR: Yeah. That's what they write in the margins that I am. But then, I think I was an infant when my father, my family, moved to Manila. I went to school there in public schools. I was ten years old when we moved back to Laoag.

CP: Oh. What did your parents do in Manila? Why did you transfer?

AR: In Manila, my father was cooking for my just like brother-in-law. My cousin is married to this Haole guy, John Noshkot. John Noshkot was the president of the Philippine Insurance Company. So we went to live together with them. He was cooking for them. Then my father decided move [back] to Laoag, I was already ten years old that time.

CP: Do you remember much about Manila?

AR: No, I can't recollect now. At that time we was living right in front of the naval academy where my uncle went to school. [He] was a naval officer. They're very strict in their navy, [with] students. When time for lunch, they ring one bell. You could hear it because it just across the street. And then all of them line up right in front of the kitchen, dining room. The second bell, they go inside and stand up by the table, but they don't sit yet. The

third bell, they sit down and ready to eat.

CP: And your uncle was going to that school?

AR: Yeah. On the next bell, they have to stand up. And if you miss that lineup, you miss your lunch. So when he miss his lunch, he always come and cry to my mother's place.

(Laughter)

AR: "So I miss my lunch." He went to fool around Manila and miss his lunch, so my father serve him, you know. That's how, something like that, he owe my parents something.

CP: So your brother-in-law, your father's brother-in-law was the . . .

AR: My mother's.

CP: Oh, your mother's brother-in-law?

AR: No, I take that back. It's my mother's cousin.

CP: Oh, your mother's cousin was going to the naval academy?

AR: Yeah.

CP: So he was Filipino?

AR: Oh, yes.

CP: But you said you went to go live with---your father went to go cook for . . .

AR: Oh, that for my brother-in-law's da kine.

CP: And he was the president of the Filipino insurance company.

AR: Yes, he was the president of the Philippine Insurance Company.

CP: Oh, I see, okay.

AR: He was a Haole guy, John Noshkot. My cousin was really beautiful, you cannot see any Filipino trace in her. She looks all over like the Spanish.

CP: Oh, and did you live with them all that time?

AR: Yeah. We living there.

CP: All the time until you went back to Laoag?

AR: Until I came ten years old.

CP: Did you go to school there too?

AR: Yeah, I did. Primary School.

CP: What language did you speak at that time?

AR: At that time I speak only Tagalog. Then we moved to Laoag, nobody speak Tagalog there, only Ilocano. There I forget the Tagalog. I speak Ilocano because only Ilocano stay in Laoag.

CP: Did you speak English at all, when you were in Manila, also?

AR: Oh yes, because you see, schools in the Philippines, there were no dialect schools, only English. If they catch you speaking your dialect in the school ground, you get suspended. Today they injecting Tagalog.

WN: Were your teachers American?

AR: Some American and some Filipinos. Yeah. So we moved to Laoag, my father put up a bakery, he was operating the bakery.

WN: What kind of bakery?

AR: Pastries. He's a very good baker. He makes all kind of---any kind you see in the bakery, he makes it. And the amazing part of it is, no recipe.

(Laughter)

WN: How did he learn how to bake?

AR: Well, I think when he was young, he was going with another cook. And he [father] came from Batanes, the most northern island of the Philippine archipelago. Then they took him to the Visayas, Visayan Islands. That's where he started cooking there again. For who, I don't know. Then came back to the north, that's how he met my mother, I think.

CP: So he met your mother in Laoag?

AR: No, in Santa Catalina. That's in Ilocos Sur. My mother is from Ilocos Sur. So that's a very far---you can see that because he come from Batanes and he get married to Ilocos Sur lady. (Laughs)

CP: How many brothers and sisters did you have at this time?

AR: We had ten altogether.

CP: Oh, so big family.

AR: Yeah, big family.

CP: And where were you in that whole . . .

AR: I'm the second one. The oldest died in San Francisco. He had a stroke.

WN: You know, you said that at ten years old you moved back from Manila to Laoag, yeah?

AR: Laoag.

WN: How did you feel about doing that? I mean, Manila is a big city, yeah, and Laoag is more out in the provinces?

AR: Well, I told you that time when, you know, you are ten years old, you don't mind the difference. It's just that at first I couldn't speak with the boys because they speak Ilocano. Until I learned to speak with them, then everything was casual.

CP: How long did it take you to learn Ilocano?

AR: Oh, I wouldn't know, because I just picked it up, you know, in school. And my parents speak Ilocano, too. That's why it was very easy to change over. (Laughs)

CP: So your father was a baker, and your mom just . . .

AR: He was a baker and he was also a cook.

CP: Oh, I see. And your mom just stayed home and took care of the family?

AR: No, my mother was a jeweler.

CP: Oh, she was jeweler?

AR: Yeah, she goes around. See, we don't have a jewelry store, so she carry jewelry, she go house to house. Just like peddling jewels. Until she died. That's why with all her walking, I think that made her leg developed. Because when I went back after they died, everybody, my niece and nephews, they admired her legs. But they didn't realize that because of her walking every day, develop the legs. (Laughs) Old as she was, they said her legs was perfect.

CP: How did she get into jewelry?

AR: She just started in it. I think because one of her distant cousin or something, was a jewel smith. Manufactured jewels, you know. And I think from there anybody want to sell their jewels, they go to her and then she goes around and sell 'em.

WN: She did this in Manila and Laoag?

AR: No, no, only Laoag. In Manila she didn't do anything.

CP: Do you remember very much about where you lived in Laoag? What kind of place it was?

AR: Yes, right in the city. Just one block away from the city market.

CP: And do you remember your house very much and the other houses around there?

AR: Yes, there was houses around there. We had neighbors.

CP: Were they all similar kind of houses, or. . . .

AR: Almost. Because down there they build houses that's always two story. We lived right beside the river. Because that river, when you flood, you flood the whole market. Water goes until the market. It's a big river. That's why they built those two-story buildings.

CP: Oh, I see. By this time you had---all your brothers and sisters were born already.

AR: Yes, yeah. Except the youngest girl.

CP: Do you remember anything you did as a child? You know, if you had any kind of chores that you had to do?

AR: Well, my mother was a strict one. In Philippines, we had maids, we had a cook, my father has a driver, and he had horses. Even racehorses. We used to have part-Arabian horses, like that. So somebody else like work, all that kind of people. Get a maid, the cook, the driver, and somebody else take care of his horses.

WN: Did other people in your neighborhood have maids and drivers and so forth?

AR: Well, not as many as we had. Because our family was something like above them all, you know. But very nice neighborhood. So our chores was we helped every one of these people. My mother used to always tell us that, "You folks not going to stay with us forever. You have to learn how to do that job." When the maid wash dishes, you help wash the dishes. You help the yardman clean the yard. You help the guy take care of the horse. All around. We help the driver wash the car. (Laughs) Those days, you know, I think in that city that time, you can count how many cars there was.

CP: And then you went to school there?

AR: Yeah.

CP: That was a public school?

AR: Public schools, uh huh [yes].

CP: What age was it that you decided to come to Hawai'i?

AR: Oh, I was about sixteen, seventeen at that time. All because my mother's cousin, he was a sea captain. He came back to Philippines to visit. And he told my mother that he wanted to take me with him back here. I was in school then. When I went home, that was a mistake my mother made by telling me that. My uncle wanted to take me. So I say, "Oh, where is he?"

"Oh, he went back."

So I says, "I'm going."

My mother said, "No, you're not. You have to continue your studies."

"No, I think I better go."

We had a family doctor, Domingo Somante. He was also the governor of that province. Through my father's political connection, you know. We had a nice picnic in my father's homestead in Pasuquins. And while we were sitting my father mentioned to him that I want to go to Hawai'i. I was wondering what that doctor will say. He said, "Let him go. I was about his age when I went adventure." This doctor used to carry Filipino candy, you know, in a basket, and used to go out in the market and sell when he was younger. Then he came to mainland, to the [United] States, self-supported himself and became a doctor. He became our family doctor, and then one day he came to visit my father and they were drinking San Miguel beer. That's the only time my father drink. He don't drink. But to keep the doctor company. Told my father that, he call him Tony, "Tony, I want to be a governor."

My father said, "What's a matter? You don't make enough money being a doctor?"

He says, "No, money no problem." He said, "I just want the name now."

So my father says, "Okay, if that's what you like." So he became a governor.

WN: Elected governor?

AR: He was elected governor. Because my father folks have a society they call Saranay. And that Saranay society in that city, any candidate that is being backed up by Saranay is something like a sure shot.

CP: What was that society?

AR: Saranay society is something like a political. . . . Like for example, how should I say that, you have a club. . . .

CP: What kind of membership? What kind of people would join this

society?

AR: Oh, all the old folks.

WN: Was it like Republicans, Democrats?

AR: Especially these people that are engaged in politics.

CP: Oh, was it like a political party?

AR: Uh huh. And right across the main road in the city, they put one big sign, you know. That candidate so-and-so backed up by Saranay.

CP: So then your father asked the family doctor, he kind of said that it would be okay for you to go. What is it . . .

AR: He told my father, "Let him go."

CP: What was it that made you want to go?

AR: I don't know. My brother was here [Hawai'i] already. He was here. And he writes back that plantation life is very hard, he cannot take it. So my mother said, "Your brother cannot take it. I don't think you can take it."

I said, "No, my brother is a silk."

(Laughter)

AR: Yeah. I told my mother, "My brother is a silk. I'm not."

WN: Like softy, you mean.

AR: Yeah, softy. I'm not. Then one day when that HSPA [Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association] president came to visit immigration, my father mentioned to him that I want to come down here. So he made the written recommendation for me.

WN: Now who . . .

AR: There were four of us in that recommendation.

CP: Now, who was this HSPA president?

AR: That was Rhett Butler. That fellow died on his way back to Hawai'i when I was here.

WN: So he was American.

AR: Oh, yeah, he was an American. He liked my father's cooking, so every time they come and visit immigration he send telegram down at immigration telling all the agents that he's coming for a visit, you know. So my father prepare lunch for him. Well, matter of fact,

I'm also involved on that because my father look at that Filipino dish they call adobo and then that omelet. My father cannot make the taste just as good as the way I make it. So when he comes, my father come and take me out from school, excuse, I cook the two dish, and go back to school.

(Laughter)

AR: I think that is very funny. But he's the man that give us the recommendation. Myself, my late cousin, he died recently, then David Cayetano, and another guy they call Juan, I forget his name, because once we came to Hawai'i, we got separated. Just like David Cayetano, once we landed in Hawai'i, we got separated. We were quarantined in Sand Island for two months because somebody in our group died of meningitis.

CP: What date did you leave Laoag, do you remember?

AR: Oh, that must be---I reach here April. Must have been in the month of March.

CP: What year was that?

AR: Nineteen thirty.

CP: Nineteen thirty that you came?

AR: Uh huh. We came under the steamer President Wilson. You know when you come to Hawai'i, they put you steerage, no more first class.

(Laughter)

AR: They had a Chinese cook in that. And when it's ready for lunch, all he had to say, come inside the room and start yelling, "Lice, lice, lice."

(Laughter)

CP: Do you remember how long the trip took?

AR: Took almost a month, I think.

CP: Oh, really. Long trip.

AR: Yeah, it's a long trip, really.

CP: Kind of uncomfortable, eh.

AR: Drifted in a boat, oh yeah. Well, it's not too bad until I got seasick. It was my fault, too. Because I was not feeling sick in the boat, and then there were people with boxing gloves. They had boxing gloves on deck. And then I went and box. After that I get seasick.

CP: How did you sleep on the boat, do you remember?

AR: Oh, we had bunks. They get bunks in steerage.

CP: So then you said you arrived here in . . .

AR: It supposed to be April 3.

CP: April 3.

AR: Uh huh [yes]. But coming from the boat, they took us straight to Sand Island.

WN: You know you said that you wanted to come to Hawai'i, and your brother wrote and said it was a hard life in Hawai'i. And then, you know, your family had maids, and life seemed good, and you were going to school. What were you really thinking about? Why did you want to come to Hawai'i?

AR: Adventure. You know, it's a funny thing. The Ilocano people, you can see them all over the island archipelago. Ilocanos are adventurous people. You can see them in Mindanao, Visayas, Batanes, all over the islands. You can see Ilocanos. The only reason why they injecting Tagalog now in school, was because when they started voting, what dialect they should use? They picked Tagalog because it's being used in the city [i.e., Manila]. But for popularity, Ilocano is the most popular dialect. You can see them all over the island.

WN: Did you intend to stay in Hawai'i for a long time?

AR: When I first came here, (laughs) I came under contract, see. I promised my mother after the contract, I'd come back.

CP: How long was the contract?

AR: It was three years, three-year contract. Then you get a free passage [back to the Philippines]. Come three years, my mother write to me, "When you coming home?"

I said, "Oh, just a little more." (Laughs) Keep on going on like that until today. I never did go back. The only time I went back is when I was in the service. I took my furlough there when we was in Visayas. So I was kind of far.

The army, you get only one month furlough, right? I took two months. See, when I took my furlough, you can hitchhike any plane coming down those days, army plane. When it was time for us to go back to our headquarters in the Visayas, we went to the airport just outside of Laoag City, and found out that there was no plane going down south that day. So I said, "See, I got to do something." I went to this MP's headquarters and when we went in there, this private was sitting down in that major's seat. So there was this

buddy of mine, Angeles Callante, he's in Berkeley now, and this guy Richard from mainland. I go over there and I said, "Good morning, sir."

And the private said, "Morning." He returned my salute, you know.

I told him that we were supposed to report in our company area this afternoon, but that they told us that there is no available plane going down south. "How about putting in our orders that there's no plane going down south?"

And he act just like a major, you know, "Let me see that." He took the papers and he typed [for] the three of us, "No available plane going down south." And he signed even the major's name. Major so-and-so, MP.

And so I took that and I give him another salute, "Thank you, sir."

He returned the salute, we go out and then my buddy said, "Hey, Alex, you never know the guy was a private?"

"I know."

"Then why you salute 'em?"

"Look what he did with our papers. We are not going back."

"What?"

"We're not going back. We going stay here one month more."

So this guy Richard, (laughs) the one from mainland, was very scared. He said, "Hey, Alex, when we go back, you going talk to the old man, you know." The old man was our captain, company commander.

"Ah. I'll talk to him."

"You sure?"

Say, "Yeah, I'll talk to him."

So the day we went back--I was in the communication. I was in charge of the telephone and all that--my lieutenant saw me coming through the gate. He said, "Hey, here comes one of the lost men."

I went to him, I said, "Morning, sir."

"Morning." And he told me congratulations. I was a PFC when I left.

"Congratulations for what?"

"You were promoted to T-5." My promotion was ready. As much as I

did all this humbug.

I look at him and said, "Oh, congratulations to you, too. I see you get your silver." He was a second lieutenant when I left. When I went back, I notice he get the first lieutenant insignia.

He said, "Yeah, thank you." He said, "You better go in there, they are waiting for you."

So I went and see our company commander. He said, "Where have you been?"

"I went in furlough, sir."

"And why didn't you return at a certain date?"

"There were no available planes coming down here."

"Let me see that paper." He look at my paper, the MP major's signature there on the bottom. What can he do?

(Laughter)

AR: So he said, "You better get out there." Because we had no phone. The entire area has no phone.

So I went out, the first [place] I go is the switchboard, you know, service switchboard for line to line. Before lunch I get all the phones going on again. Then I went to the supply sergeant. The supply sergeant went out the same time with us on furlough. "Hey, Sarge. Issue me some equipment."

"What equipment?"

"Everything. Blankets, shirts, all that, whole thing."

"You going to pay for it?" He tell me. "Where you put them?"

"Oh, I left it home. I left it with my relatives, all that army blankets, and shirts, and everything."

Then he asked me, "What the old man said?" Being late and everything.

"Nothing."

"You mean to tell me he never tell you nothing?"

"No. He just tell me to go back to do my work."

He tell, "Son of a gun, I should have done the same thing."

(Laughter)

AR: But then, that's how it was.

WN: Backing up little bit, we were talking about Sand Island. You said that you were quarantined . . .

AR: In Sand Island, every evening doctor come inside and inspect.

CP: Every evening?

AR: Yeah. There were nurses. The Haole nurse, the head nurse was, I think, Miss Sheldon. Her name was Miss Sheldon, I don't know the rest of her name, but very attractive lady. I think it's Chinese, Haole lady. There's some other nurses there. My advantage was that I was the only English speaker in that group. So I help them take temperatures, because they take our temperature in the morning and take 'em in the evening. So I help the nurse who was assigned to take temperatures. We line up the menfolks, and then we start taking the temperature. So I used to help them. I either write or read the temperature. So that was the advantage I had. Something like a priority, like.

Then one day I had a temperature. And like myself, I hate to go in the hospital. So they tell me, "You better go in the hospital." I went, but I didn't go in the hospital, I stayed by the hospital ground. Then we took the temperature, evening, and the nurse told me, "Hey, you get the highest temperature in the hospital." That scared me. Because if you have a temperature by ten o'clock in the evening those doctors [would have] come. There was about five of them, and they [would have] taken fluid from my neck. They put the needle, put a big needle in your neck . . .

WN: Back of your neck?

AR: Yeah. And they take fluid samples. So [the thought of] that scared me, so when I found out I had the highest temperature, I went to the hospital, I took my bed and cover myself with a blanket. I wanted to sweat it out. By ten o'clock in the evening, that Haole nurse came and wake me up, and put the temperature in my mouth, thermometer. It was a long ward. By that time she reach the door, I fall asleep again. Then she came back and snatch that thermometer from my mouth. Then she tells me, "You are dead."

"What you mean, 'you are dead?'"

"It says you get no temperature." Because the fever went down. And then I felt my back, my pillow, wet like. I turn around and look at my pillow, it was a green sweat. Was green. The first time I see that kind of sweat. So I was, (laughs) I was ashamed of it, I turned around the pillow. Then in a few moments, the doctors came. One of the [other] boys had a temperature, and so they took that [fluid], as I said, take it right behind the neck. And if they take only one flask, it's okay. But get five of them, so it was pretty plenty liquid. By the time they finish, you cannot turn around.

But this boy was strong. One of the doctors was kidding me, he says, "You want to have that?"

I said, "No, I don't."

"You're going to get it."

"No, I don't want that."

He must have been here long time, the doctor, big Haole doctor, even talk Ilocano little bit. He said, "You're lucky. Your fever went down so we don't have to take [fluid]." So I was happy.

That evening (laughs) I give the nurses rough time, eh. I woke up in the morning, this Haole nurse again, one of the early nurses came to give me one real thick medicine. I told her, "I cannot take medicine."

She said, "No, this is the doctor's orders."

"I don't care if it's a doctor's orders, I cannot take medicine." It's that stink medicine, you know. For your stomach, I think.

CP: You just didn't want to take it?

AR: I just didn't want to take it. And she insisted that I take it. So I took the glass, went in the basin and dumped it. And then she tell me, "I'll report you to the head nurse." That's Miss Sheldon.

Well, Miss Sheldon and I were like this. (Laughs)

WN: You were good friends, you mean?

AR: Yeah, I was good friends with that head nurse, Miss Sheldon. She has beautiful eyes. I couldn't forget her eyes, yeah. Because she's the one that the company asked from the ship to Sand Island. Well, she was standing by the door of the barge. I was so attracted with her eyes, and she noticed that, I think. And she was looking at me, what's going on. But I didn't go and talk to her. Next morning, she came, "I heard you didn't want to take your medicine."

Oh, I explained to her that I couldn't take it, because if I put that in my mouth, it would come out anyway. And I told her, "I want to go out from here."

"Nobody ever did that," she said. You cannot come down there, sleep overnight, go out the next morning."

But I told her I get more sicker staying in the hospital, you know, I cannot stand the hospital.

So she said, "You wait till the doctor come."

After that the doctor came. She told the doctor I think what I wanted. The doctor came to my bed, and shake my head, and shake me here, and shake me there, and asking me if sore.

I said, "No." I recognize it was to my advantage, so I said, "No." (Laughs) So he wen put his thumb between, you know on your leg like that? He put it in, and he was very strong, he put his thumb like that, and just like his thumb is going inside the flesh and bending my leg.

But I wanted to go out from the hospital so much, he asked me, "Sore?"

I said, "No."

WN: Which hospital were you at?

AR: Oh, I was in Sand Island. I don't know what hospital that. Then he told me to walk to the door. It was a long walk, a long one, eh. "Walk to the door." So I walked and go back. He take my head and my hair again, and he shake my head like that. "You dizzy?"

"No."

Then he went back to his office and the nurse, Miss Sheldon, comes say, "He said you can go out."

WN: So altogether two months?

AR: Two months, because we were supposed to be quarantined one month. But then we did one month, before we could finish that one month another one got sick. So was another month. It was luckily that after the second month nobody got sick. Otherwise we would keep on going one month, one month, you know.

CP: So after you left the hospital, where did you go?

AR: Straight to Kōloa.

CP: Why was that? Did you have a choice or was there something that. . . .

AR: You don't have no choice. They pick your names something like the army: so and so and so go to pier yard, so and so go to Kekaha, whatever. So my cousin was assigned in Kealia.

WN: What about your brother, where was he? Your brother?

AR: My brother? The one that died?

WN: That wrote to you, yeah.

CP: The one that first came, he was here . . .

WN: That came before you.

AR: I don't even know.

CP: Oh, so you didn't even know where he was living?

AR: I don't even know. What I think is that when he was going to Mainland on that boat, our boat, our ship was going in. So we never meet here.

CP: So he couldn't---you were saying he had a hard time on the plantation. Is that why he left?

AR: Yeah, he couldn't take it. So, I'm the hardhead one. I just wanted to prove to my mother, to my parents that I can take it. So I came [to Koloa] and first day I went they assigned us to the field, kālai. I went, the next day, I lay off.

(Laughter)

AR: I couldn't take it. The luna was a Filipino man, he's still alive yet.

CP: Oh, do you remember his name?

AR: Quirino. [Mariano] "Quirino" Aquino.

CP: Oh, that was him?

AR: Yeah, he used to come and see, used to tell me, "You kālai like one wahine.

(Laughter)

WN: You know when they recruited Filipinos to come work in Hawai'i, usually they would look for the workingman. You weren't a workingman, though.

AR: Those days, is strictly laborers. No students. Or they had to see your hands. When we was in immigration for that physical, when I stretch my hand like this to Dr. Palancia, Dr. Palancia was the doctor. He look my hand, he shook his head, he go in the office. Then they show him the recommendation. Can't already. It's recommended that this be apprentice. What can you do?

WN: So if you didn't have your father's connections, would you say that you wouldn't have been able to come to Hawai'i?

AR: I wouldn't be able at that time if my father was not the agent. That's how I came.

WN: We're going to turn the tape over now.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

AR: I was always a rebel, and those days in the [Kōloa] Mill, when I started working in the mill [in 1930], after harvesting season we are all that non-skilled laborers, like us, sent to the field, kālai. So, they went in the field about four o'clock in the afternoon, we're supposed to pau hana. Then Mr. [Norman] Deverill was the field supervisor, he came to the field and he saw kapulu. He was already on the locomotive, you know that transportation before, they had locomotive, eh. He came and he said, "Everybody go back in the field because you folks made kapulu." But that was four o'clock already, you know.

So we had to jump out from this truck. And I jump out, I told the other boys--the other men, they were all old men, local folks here, "You folks want to go back, you go back. I'm not going back." Then they decided nobody go back. "So, okay if nobody go back, tomorrow he going ask where is the leader. Nobody lead, you know, you have to tell him nobody lead. I am not leading you guys."

They said, "Okay."

So the next morning, they put us into something just like a skirmish formation. He suspected me. But he cannot do anything. He even talk Ilocano for the old folks that can't understand too much English. He was a tall Haole guy who is the boss, you know. Now, I didn't let nobody boss me, I boss myself. So he couldn't do anything.

CP: How much longer did you work in the field before you . . .

AR: (Until the mill started grinding cane again.) After that I went back to the mill, and then as I say, every off season, they send us to the field, the chemist.

CP: Oh, I see. What was considered off season for those days?

AR: When they stop grinding cane. When they are through with their quota. Here they get a quota to fill. They get so many field to cut. After they cut all those field, they get off season. Something like the pineapple, you know.

CP: What months would they be?

AR: Oh, you cannot say. Sometime they stop November, sometime December, depending (on how many fields they have to harvest.) Then, the second year, that chemist send us again to the field. I went to see him. He was Mr. Wickey, Samuel Wickey, he was the head chemist. I said, "Mr. Wickey, we just had papers again to go back in the field,

given by Mr. Gregg." Mr. [Carl] Gregg was the assistant chemist. I explained to him, "You know, I came to the mill to work because I could not take the work outside. But if you keep on sending us outside, maybe after season, I might as well get out."

So he said, "Well, okay, Ruiz." He said, "You come back. You work here." If he leave me back he have to leave the other guys. From that time on, nobody go out until today.

CP: Oh, I see. So, in other words you feel like your case was the first one that caused everybody to stay in the mill?

AR: Right, right. From that time on, nobody go out in the field. Because if I stay back, the other guys will say, "How come only he stay back?" The only ones that stayed back [previously] was the skilled workers like the welders, or mechanics, and all that, you know. Tradesmen. From that time on, everybody stay back.

CP: So, when did you first start working in the mill?

AR: Oh, that was in April, too.

CP: That was just like the same month that you came to Kōloa. So you . . .

AR: Because they used to have camp bosses, he was a Visayan man, Gavino Kilantang, was Filipino man. Somehow he wanted me to stay back in the plantation, because he knew that I came as a student and could speak pretty good English. So he figured that I would be a leader, you know, around the community. So he wanted me very much to stay in the plantation. Even tried to lie to the chemist. He told the chemist that I used to work Philippine mill. And the chemist asked me, "Ruiz, you used to work in the Philippine mill?"

I couldn't, you know I was that type that I forgot what that camp boss told me. I said, "No, I never did."

"You never did work in the mill?"

"No." He smiled and go away. Oh, shit. I forgot the boss.

(Laughter)

AR: I forgot all about it, you know. So they caught the guy lying. That's another thing. I couldn't tell the lie.

CP: When you went to the mill, what job did they start you off with?

AR: They start me off with the number two machine. They called it number two machine. You drop that molasses, why, they call it masket, that's a mixture of molasses and the sugar granules, there. And the masket will eliminate the molasses from that granules. Then what I do is dig the sugar, drop it in the conveyor, and then it

goes to the crystallizer, to be crystallized again. I did that for one year. It was pretty easy, because most of the workers was coming to help me dig the sugar.

One night, we were not supposed to put water inside there, so it was easy to dig. The assistant chemist worked nighttime, after drop that masket in a basket, he used to come and put water, and it makes it very hard to dig. So I said, "Ah, this guy fool around me, like that." So I tell the other guy, there's two guys, see. "Hey, we go home." He was scared to go home, the chemist stay by the door, we not going through that side, we climb down to the column. So we climbed to the column and went home.

Then the foreman, he was a Filipino man, Stephen Bromeo, brother to this Agustin. That went to him and said, "Nobody stay on number two machine."

The chemist said, "They stay there. I was here watching them."

"No, they didn't come down here, they came down the column." (Laughs)

Five o'clock in the morning they come wake me up, this head chemist and this Mr. Kilantang, the camp boss. And Mr. Wickey said, "Why did you go home last night?"

I said, "Mr. Gregg fool around our basket."

"What you mean, fool around your basket?"

"Mr. Wickey, you give us instruction not to put water in the masket. As soon as we load the basket with the masket, Mr. Gregg come down there and start putting water. It was pretty hard to dig. So we came home."

He knew I was right, so he says, "Are you coming to work tonight?"

"All depends. Mr. Gregg don't fool around us." I said, "I don't want that kind."

He said, "Are you coming to work or not?"

In those days there was no union, eh. So I said, "Okay, I'm coming."

(Laughs) So we went in that night. You see, we dig fifteen minutes to drop that masket, then it takes another hour before we dig again. In that hour we don't do nothing, just wait for 'em. And this Mr. Gregg, now, he come and pick the other guy, make him clean all around the crystallizers all night. So the guy said, "Hey, why only me being sent over there? How come he don't send you too?"

I said, "You ask him."

I notice about the Haoles, you show to them that you are not scared to them, they respect you. Something like Deverill, when he found out, he knew that I lead that strike against him, he caught me talking story with another fellow in this field here, they used to ride horses, eh. And the other guy was talking story and all of a sudden, hey, here comes a horse, and was Mr. Deverill. So he started scolding the other guy, you know. And went away and we went back to our work, and this guy said, "Hey, how come he only scold me? How come he no scold you?"

I said, "You ask him."

But I notice that's how they are.

CP: Why do you think that Mr. Gregg was doing that, though, in the first place?

AR: Ah, he's a moody man. He also hold my neck and I hold his neck one day.

CP: Oh, what was that about?

AR: Because we were assigned to put down this mud plates on the flat locomotive cars. And he came over there, watching us. You know these old folks, the Filipino folks, they were very scared of Haoles, eh. So I told them, "Hey, you folks go and drink water." So they went.

Mr. Gregg says, "Put the plate down." We hoist it with the tackle.

I said, "Nobody there."

"I said put it down."

I said, "Nobody there."

Then he said, "Put it down."

Said, "Okay." Poom, I let go the rope. I supposed to put it down slowly. I let go the rope, boom.

He come over there all red. (Laughs) "Want to broke the plate?" He hold my shirt like that.

I hold his shirt, "I told you nobody there."

(Laughter)

AR: He was pretty tall man.

WN: Were you scared?

AR: No, I never scared. Otherwise I wouldn't hold his neck.

(Laughter)

AR: So then he came, he called me, he said, "Ruiz, help me cement the washing machine." They have one washing machine where they wash the burlap bags from the filter. So I went to help him, right after that incident.

Then pau hana came, he forgot his trowel. So I took his trowel, I clean it, oil it, I went to give it to him. "Mr. Gregg, you forget your trowel."

"Oh, thank you," he said. Then I was going out and he called me back. And he start apologizing for what he did.

I said, "No, I don't think it's your fault, because I should be the one apologizing to you because I'm not supposed to argue with my supervisors."

"No, no, no, it's my fault," he said. "You know, Ruiz, at home I could be nice and smiling now, all of a sudden I get mad. And my wife know that," he said. "So when I do that, my wife just leave me alone and I cool off again," he said.

"Oh, I'm glad you told me that. Next time I see you in that mood, I keep away from you."

"Yeah, do that," he said. "You do that."

We became good friends. He invited me to his house on weekends, drink coffee with the family, you know, with him. And the wife was a good baker, she could make nice cakes. So they start asking about me. "Alex," they was already calling me Alex, that way, "you was born in Koloa?"

I said, "No, ma'am. I was born in Philippines."

"Born in the Philippines?"

I says, "Yeah."

"You must have come down here early and go to school."

"No, I didn't go to school here either."

"How come you speak so good English?" She telling me.

And I explained to her that in Philippines there is no such thing as dialect school, only English. The fact is, we have more universities there in the Philippines than you have here.

She said, "I never know that."

(Laughs) That's what they don't know, yeah. They think Philippines

are all illiterate and all that stuff. They have college, universities there, and they teach only English. We get teachers come in from Mainland [USA]. So she said she never know.

That's why, you no need scared the Haoles, already. Then as I said, one time we had that strike in here, yeah.

CP: What year was that, that strike?

AR: I don't remember what year. But that was the last strike I attended.

WN: Was that only Filipinos striking?

AR: No, the whole plantation.

WN: That's not after the war one? Before the war?

AR: After the war.

WN: Oh, after the war, okay, '46. [AR is talking about the strike in 1958.]

AR: Not so many years ago. No, I'm telling this story, because we had a meeting. I was one of the stewards in the mill, and we had a meeting in the union headquarters. And the meeting was supposed to assign us to whatever we should do, communications, soup kitchen, and all that stuff. That time Bob Kunimura was the chairman. Hakaru Kunimura was with us [in the mill], he was in the electrical department. And he was supposed to be assigned as relief chairman, but then when we was having the meeting this Mac Kageyama and this Saturnino Racelo was whispering at each other. They didn't like that. Hakaru Kunimura didn't like that. He stood up, he said, "Shit! What kind of meeting is this, whispering at yourself? I quit." He went home.

So then this Bob Kunimura said, "Alex, you take chairmanship."

"Me?"

He said, "Yeah, you take the chairmanship. Relief chairman."

"Okay, Bob, I'll take the relief chairman. No soup kitchen."

"What you mean, no soup kitchen?"

"We going to coupon."

"How you going to make that?"

"Well, we'll give them a month's [worth] of coupons they are entitled to receive as a ration, instead of giving them corned beef and rice and what and that. Some people maybe don't like corned

beef, some people might not like certain things that we give them. Well, then we give them coupon, and they go buy themself whatever they like according to size of family. Then I go to the stores and I tell the stores to accept the coupon and then at the end of the month we reimburse it."

"Oh, maybe you can try," he said.

Then this Mac Kageyama says, "No good, that."

I said, "Why not?"

"They going gamble with it."

So I said, "Mac, when they get paid during payday, you can't stop them from gambling? That's the same thing. That's their money. If they gamble, that's their hard luck."

"Maybe we can try."

And then we had---used to be Kōloa and Grove Farm. Grove Farm, they have another unit there, but they're the same union. Bob Kunimura was the chairman. They had this Take, one of the boys was [Takeo Takamatsu], he was the relief chairman. And Robert Girald, he became one of the union big shots. So we went to tell them that we going to make coupon. They didn't agree, because they are in favor of the soup kitchen. You know, they make themselves like big shots, and go to their store, and tell them, oh, we need so many things like this, so many case corned beef, and this and that, you know, coffee. That's what they wanted, you know. But they lose out when they started working [again]. So we went into coupon and it was very good. All these people that was ashamed to come and get the soup they used to cook over here, came to get the coupon. Everybody get his share. And you know who claim that started that today? The Local.

WN: Who?

AR: The Local.

CP: Oh, the [ILWU] Local.

AR: The Local claim they started it. But I started it. You can verify that by asking Fred Sasan.

CP: Fred Sasan?

AR: Fred Sasan. He living in Puhi. So I said, "Hey, Fred, who started the coupon?"

He said, "I know, I know, Alec, but the Local claim it, what you going do?" You can't do anything.

CP: So the other plantations used coupons, too, or only Kōloa?

AR: Only Kōloa, McBryde, and Kaumakani, I think.

WN: Not Grove Farm?

AR: Grove Farm, McBryde. Kōloa used to be Grove Farm already. Grove Farm and Kōloa is the same unit. They already merged, Grove Farm and Kōloa.

WN: Oh, okay, so the merger was '48, so this is a later strike, then, eh?

AR: Yeah, later.

WN: More like '58?

AR: Yeah, I believe so, not so many years ago, you know, we had that strike.

WN: Oh, okay. So after 1948, that strike, yeah.

AR: Yeah. So I had to go to every store from here to Waimea and also to the schools from here to Waimea School, tell the principal that we are using coupon. You know, one day I went to Sueoka Store and the lady asked me, "Hey, Alex, you folks people, what, you can sell liquor?"

I say, "Why do you ask me that?"

"Because McBryde officers came and told us that we cannot sell the people liquor with the coupon."

I said, "You sell them whatever they want. If they want liquor, they want clothings, that's their business. If you don't sell them liquor, they lose their morale, then the strike is no good. We are not only after their help, we are also after their morale. Their morale is low, the strike is no good."

Say, "Yeah, that's right."

"So sell 'em anything." Maybe the liquor is more important than the food.

(Laughter)

WN: So going back to 1930, you were in the mill, then?

AR: I was in the mill.

CP: You sample boy with the chemist, yeah, 1935? Is that correct?

AR: Yeah, sample boy. I was a sample boy. That's another thing. I was

a sample boy and the head (analyst) went to another job and I was supposed to be next for his position, right? Well, they didn't put me in that position because those days, as I said, no more union. So this [other] guy was recommended by one of the (sugar boilers) to the canneries. So, the first time he come in the (mill), they put him as a head (analyst). So I go in to see Mr. Wickey again. I accuse him of being unfair. I said, "Mr. Wickey, you know you are not fair."

He said, "Why?"

So I explained to him that, "I'm supposed to take the head (analyst), and you put that new guy. After all, I was here before him."

He knew it was his fault. He said, "Okay, Ruiz, I'll fix you up." But that's all, eh. He tell me he going fix me up, but he didn't do anything. (Laughs) But then again, I already told him what I think of him, so I didn't care.

CP: Under the new (analyst), did you stay a sample boy there for much longer?

AR: Well, yeah, I was his sample boy. I take samples for him. And I take samples from him and he do the analyzing.

CP: So what did that job entail? Did you have to go out in the fields?

AR: No, no, no. You take samples of the syrup, the bagasse, the juice, all the things that's in the mill. You take sample of how much lime they have in the juice. So we analyze all that. One thing I notice about---don't let them catch you lying. One day I was going back (laughs) it's off season again so they make us scrub the tank. I was going back after we eat our lunch, and I heard the scraper. I pass one automatic faucet on my way, so playfully I knock the faucet with that still and it fall down. (Laughs) I look around, you know, "Oh, the hell." So I went back in my tank, but that thing fell already. Then this assistant chemist, Mr. Gregg, he's a Haole guy, one hour later he came knock on the tank where I was. I came out, I said, "Yes, sir."

He tell, "Ruiz, you know who broke this?" The pipe.

"I did, sir."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, that's good," he said. "Very good," he tell me.

"What's good about it, I broke it."

"I was watching you," he said. "I was on the pan floor." He said, "That's good. Don't ever tell lies."

"No, I don't tell lies."

"What's broke, we can fix. But don't lie."

"No, I don't lie."

He must have told that to the head chemist, too, after that. But they never catch me lying.

WN: When you moved to sample boy, was that any raise in pay at all?

AR: No, the same thing. As I said, those days, no more union. You get one dollar.

WN: Oh, one dollar [a day]. And how many hours you worked in the mill?

AR: Twelve hours. Five to five. Five in the afternoon till five in the morning.

CP: And you had a lunch break, what was . . .

AR: Then your shift come. Well, you get your lunch break.

CP: How long was that, about?

AR: You get a thirty minute lunch break.

CP: Did you get any breaks in between?

AR: No. No coffee breaks. Only thing if you work twenty-one days, then you have a ten cents bonus. It's dollar ten cents, instead of one dollar. But if you cannot work twenty-one days, you get straight dollar.

CP: Where did you live during this time?

AR: In the [New] Mill Camp. They used to have the camp there.

CP: Did you live there from the time that you came, when you first came?

AR: No, when I first came here, there was a Filipino Camp over here with all field workers were living.

WN: What kind of houses were in that Filipino Camp?

AR: Oh, just one by twelve. Something like, just like one warehouse, you know. Divided into rooms. All single men, there.

CP: Oh, so it was like a rooming house, then?

AR: Yes. And they have a long porch. When you first see that, you don't feel like coming to Hawai'i.

(Laughter)

AR: You know, when I [first] went to the house, I look at that house and all that you see hanging, you know this people that carry the cane, they use to get hapai ko? And you know how dirty their clothes is, eh? That's all hanging on the porch. You look at that and say, "Oh, no."

CP: How long did you stay in that place?

AR: No, I didn't stay pretty long, because I go out in the field, and then I cannot take it, I lay off. Then Mr. Gavino Kilantang, as I said, wanted me to stay back on the plantation. He tell me, "You go to the mill." Then he give me instruction, "Tell the guy that you used to work in a mill." So I worked in the mill. I didn't stay long on that house.

CP: And then when you went to the mill, you moved to [New] Mill Camp.

AR: Went to the [New] Mill Camp.

WN: When you compare [New] Mill Camp with Filipino Camp, what was the difference?

AR: See, the [New] Mill Camp is more clean. The houses are cleaner, it's something like these houses, here, for example.

WN: Individual houses?

AR: It's a house. It's a house with rooms, like that, regular house. Not like the Filipino Camp, before, they had the big, long, like a warehouse, like, divided into rooms.

CP: Did you have your own house? Did they assign you to a house?

AR: You see, with one house, get about four or five guys live in one house.

CP: At [New] Mill Camp?

AR: Uh huh [yes]. You get your own room. Unless you have another body room with you, whatever. But I was alone in my room.

WN: And then at Filipino Camp, how many people were in the same---did you get your own room?

AR: Ah, no. The Filipino Camp? You got to room with somebody else. Get two army bunk, army cot. You live on the army cot.

WN: How big was the room?

AR: Oh, something like. . . . Let's say, maybe. . . . Maybe ten by ten, or eleven by ten, or something like that. Square room.

CP: Not very big.

AR: And you go toilet, you got to go outside, eh. (Laughs)

CP: Did they have like outhouses outside?

AR: Toilet?

CP: Yeah.

AR: No, they used to have that pit. They used to have a box, you know, under the seat, and that is being collected every day. Then when another man used to collect that, and they used to call him "Kukai Joe" or something. He used to collect all those, they dump it way up (in the mountains).

WN: So those barracks, I mean the rooms, lined up, about how many rooms were there in one building?

AR: In one building, I bet about maybe a dozen room in there.

WN: Dozen rooms? And then how many buildings were there in Filipino Camp?

AR: I don't remember how many building were there. All I remember is that building that I went.

CP: I guess they were mostly single men living in Filipino Camp?

AR: Single men, all single men.

CP: Do you remember any---were there very many couples at all, or any other Filipino women?

AR: Very few family used to come in here. I know, Mariano "Quirino" [Aquino], you know, must have brought his family here, because when I came here, he already have a family, eh. But the rest is all single men.

WN: And even in New Mill Camp was mostly single men?

AR: Yeah, yeah. There are a few, maybe a couple of family. The rest all single men.

CP: After you worked as sample boy, where did you go after that? What was your next job?

AR: On the store.

CP: What year was that that you went to the store?

AR: I work in the mill about four to five years, I think. And then I went to the store, then I stayed in the store for oh, many, many years.

CP: How did you get the job at the [Kōloa] Plantation Store?

WN: Do you want to take a break? Why don't we stop here?

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 15-42-2-87

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Alex Ruiz (AR)

June 25, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Chris Planas (CP)

CP: This is an interview with Alex Ruiz on June 25, 1987 at his home in Kōloa. Interviewer is Chris Planas.

I think the last time we were here you began to talk about when you first started working at the plantation store [1933].

AR: Oh yeah. That's right.

CP: Do you remember what year that was?

AR: That was between '33 and '34.

CP: When you first started?

AR: Yeah. First started in the store.

CP: How was it that you got the job?

AR: Well, there was an opening at that time and I applied for it. And there were several of us applied to it, but the plantation used to pick who has the best record in the plantation. At that time I already had the best record because I used to work even Sundays to earn more money, you know what I mean. So I was picked. Because that time they were paying us only a dollar a day in the plantation, and the store was paying by salary. They were paying at that time thirty-five dollars a month which is more than what we earn outside. So I went to the store. At that time, the very beginning of the store, the store was making all right, because so many plantation workers and they monopolize to buy at the store. So the store was making money and every year we celebrated by having a store party. And that kept going on like that until the war started. When the war started I went in the service. When I came back [in 1946] they were having the first strike in the plantation.

CP: What year was that strike?

AR: Well, it was in. . . . (AR asks wife) What year did I come back?

AR's wife: Forty-six.

AR: Forty-five or forty-six?

AR's wife: Something like that [1946].

AR: Somewhere around there. The plantation was on strike at that time. That's the first plantation strike they were having. But the store [employees were] not included in that strike because the members of the union needed a store to go and purchase their goods.

CP: When you went to work for the store, what kind of job did you have?

AR: Regular clerk. We used to go out and take orders in the camp and deliver. And when we came back after the war, the store was not making too good then, because it [i.e., Koloa Plantation] was already unionized and our buyer, Mr. [Mitsugi] Nishihara, was running the store just like the way they was running way before the war. So one day I told him, "Mitsugi, you have the wrong price on your goods." It's after the war, yeah.

He tell me, "What do you mean?"

"Your price is too high. You supposed to lower your prices and sell in volume. Today if you cannot sell in volume, you are out of business," I told him.

He said, "Aahh, you don't know what you're talking about," he tell me.

I said, "I don't think so, you don't know what you're talking about. The trouble with you is that when we pau hana from the store you go home, work on your garden, you don't go out. You should go out and observe what is going on in the [other] stores. Your price is the (same as during) prewar days." Because I could read the code, see, I know how much they bought that goods [for]. So I told him that's too high.

He said, "Ah, you don't know what you're talking about."

I said, "Nah. Up to you."

Then they started to complain about the store not making money, you know. One day we went to work and he tell us, "You know this store is losing $10,000 a month."

I said, "Where did you hear that?"

"We had a meeting inside the plantation office and they showed me the book."

"What book you saw?"

He tell, "What do you mean, what book I saw?"

"Mitsugi, there are two books in there. One for you to see, one for you not to see. Which one did you see?"

(Laughter)

AR: And he get mad with me. "You don't know what you're talking about."

I tell, "I think I know what I'm talking about, you don't know what you're talking about."

So that goes on, then they start giving rumors that the store going close, you know, they going sell the store. When the rumors coming on, the head chemist in the mill came to see me. He asked me if I like go back to the mill. That was Mr. Samuel Wickey. I said, "Mr. Wickey, closing of the store is only a rumor. They didn't give us any official word. So until they give us the official word, then I would know how to decide."

He said, "Oh, that's right, too," he says. "Anyway, if you decide to come back to the mill, you come see me."

I said, "Thank you."

CP: What year was that about?

AR: Oh, that was about. . . . [The Kōloa Plantation Store closed] right after Hawai'i become a state [in 1959].

CP: Oh, this was late already then.

AR: Yeah, late already. Right after Hawai'i become a state.

CP: Oh, so you worked in the store all the way up until that time?

AR: That's right, yeah. Many, many years. One day, the manager of the plantation [from 1948 to 1953], Mr. [William P.] Alexander came to the store and gave us a meeting asking the clerks any idea of promotion to make a better sale. I told him---I was always the talkative one anyway. (Laughs) With the other people, I don't know if they care to talk or what, or maybe they're afraid or ashamed or whatever. Anyway, I said, "Mr. Alexander, you want to increase the store sales, first thing we should do is to remodel the store."

He said, "Oh, we cannot do that."

I said, "Why not?"

"You folks don't have the money to remodel the store. You folks have to make the money first before we can remodel the store."

"Well, why don't we get rid of the coupon, then," I said.

He tell me, "What coupon?"

"Mr. Alexander, you know that for one Filipino man to buy anything in the store, we must issue a coupon, and he's being discriminated [against] by that. Furthermore, the lowest coupon book you can issue is three dollars. All right, he goes around, buy things in the store and he doesn't have enough for the three dollars. The next issue is five dollars and he don't want the five dollar. So instead of buying another dollar, he goes outside and buy the dollar." The manager didn't know we was giving coupons to the Filipinos. [In a later conversation, AR says that coupons for use in the plantation store were issued in books valued at either three or five dollars. Each book contained individual coupons in denominations of fifty cents or one dollar, but coupons could not be issued individually. AR recalls that an office was located in the store where Filipinos would have to go to get these coupon books; a record book was kept by the store to make sure that a Filipino worker was only issued coupon books with a value equal to the amount in wages earned up to that point. According to AR, Filipinos could always make purchases with cash, but his point in the previous paragraph is that a Filipino would be reluctant to ask for a coupon book with a greater value than what he or she would actually spend in the plantation store, when that person could go to another, privately-operated store and pay for goods with cash.]

He said, "I didn't know that, how did that start?"

I told him, "Before the union was formed, Filipinos can work here today and go to Kekaha or whatever, or Lihu'e to work the next day. That's why they issued the coupon to make sure that they can collect (past debts) from them."

"Oh, I see," he said.

"But now the union is formed, they cannot do that. They cannot work today and work Lihu'e tomorrow."

So he said, "Why don't we get rid of that coupon?"

And our buyer, Mr. Nishihara says, "Oh, we cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"We don't have enough Filipinos to write Filipino names."

(Laughs) So I asked him, "How do you write Filipino names, in Japanese?"

He couldn't talk because it's true, you know. So that goes on like that, anyway. And then in the meantime, the same week our president of Grove Farm company, Mr. Gaylord Wilcox, went to Mainland and met with another guy from Chicago to come and manage the store. Our present manager was Mr. [Homer] Maxey. Then Mr. Senger came. In

less than a month, as soon as he came they start remodeling the store. So I (laughs) asked Mr. Nishihara, our buyer, "You remember what Mr. Alexander said? About not being able to remodel the store because the store has no money to remodel it?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"How come? Not even one month and they remodeling the store."

Said, "Because the new manager come. That's right, no," he said. (Laughs)

And they remodel the store. So they made Mr. Maxey retire and [Charles] Senger took over. Mr. Senger, when they went to see him in Mainland, I think they made a contract, agreement with him. Mr. Wilcox and him made a verbal agreement, it's not written. So that was a mistake he made.

CP: Oh, why is that?

AR: Because he told Mr. Wilcox that because the store is not making money he's going to buy his goods from the cheapest wholesaler that he can get. And Mr. Wilcox consented to that kind of thing. "And then also I'm not going to recognize any plantation manager, any plantation bosses. I will run the store as I wish."

And Mr. Wilcox agreed to all those conditions. So that's what he did. And then he came and he start making weekly sales. Those days nobody make weekly sales. I don't think any place in the state was making any weekly sales.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

CP: What does that mean? Oh, so every week he would have a special.

AR: Every week he make all kind of specials, yeah. Then he was buying his goods from the drummers that were giving the cheapest. He even make a contract with the soda water company. He make them bid. He was very clever. He said they used to do that in Chicago. He make that soda water company bid who give him the cheapest per case. At that time, George's Soda was the most popular soda in Kaua'i.

CP: What soda was it?

AR: George's Soda. It was the most popular. People used to drink only George's Soda and he bid the lowest one so we carry only George's Soda. Went like that for a year, then after that George came to the store and he started to complain that he is selling his soda much cheaper than the rest of them. "And it's no good because next thing you know the other soda company will go down in price and then I'll have to go down again. So I don't think I would like that anymore," he says.

Our manager was a hot temper guy, too, you know.

CP: Mr. Senger?

AR: Yeah, Mr. Senger. He said, "Okay, take your soda out." So he took his soda out and then he [Senger] called that Kist Soda from Kekaha. And he guarantee Kist Soda. If Kist Soda sell soda water for a dollar a case he guarantee them hundred case a month. So he put a big sign in front of the store, "Kist Soda. Dollar a case." So the people started buying Kist Soda because it was very cheap. George's Soda died. They don't drink George's Soda anymore, they drink only Kist. So George came back to the store and beg for us to take his soda but our manager said, "No, we don't want your soda." (Laughs) That's how George's Soda wiped out.

Then the other stores start to call him because of the specials that he is making. We are selling our meat cheaper than the rest of them and they want to have a meeting with that manager so that they can stabilize their prices. But he tell them, "You make your own price and I'll make mine." (Laughs) That was the kind of guy he was.

CP: You know Mr. Senger came pretty recently, yeah. And before that you said there was a Mr. Maxey?

AR: Mr. [Homer] Maxey was the original one.

CP: Oh, he was the original one. And then before him was Mr. Mitsugi?

AR: No, he was the buyer. Mitsugi was the buyer. Mitsugi Nishihara. He was the buyer.

CP: So Mr. Maxey, he was the manager when you first started working there.

AR: Long time, yeah.

CP: How was it different before the war? How was the store run before the war under Mr. Maxey?

AR: Well, when Mr. Maxey was the manager before the war, the plantation people used to monopolize the store.

CP: How do you mean?

AR: Well, the store get more goods than the rest of the stores in Kōloa, and also they buy [i.e., sell] by coupon. That's why the Filipinos come and issue coupons. So they cannot spend their coupon any other place, they have to spend it at the store. That made a difference.

CP: How did that work out? Did they get paid in coupons?

AR: Well, Filipinos come in the office, and they are issued maybe three dollars worth of coupons. And that is automatically deducted from

their paycheck. That's the idea of the coupon.

CP: I see. Was that only for Filipinos or was that for everybody?

AR: Only Filipinos.

CP: Oh, why was that?

AR: Because of the fact that those days was mostly single Filipinos. As I said, they can work today, and work Lihu'e tomorrow. So by issuing the coupon from them, they can collect whatever they issued before they go anyplace. It's just like an assurance that they are collecting.

CP: Oh. Do you think that that was---they paid them like that to keep them working on the plantation, too?

AR: No, they don't get paid in coupon. They are paid in cash. But in order to buy anything from the store they have to issue coupon and use the coupon to purchase anything they want to buy.

CP: And you are saying this was only done for Filipinos?

AR: It was only done to Filipinos. So after that they feel discriminated like that.

CP: In other words, a Filipino couldn't just go into the store and just pay money?

AR: They can pay money if they get the cash. But by issuing the coupon was just like charging it. Because they don't pay the cash, they pay coupon, but it is deducted from their paycheck.

CP: I see, okay. And when you started working in '34, that was the system that was going on?

AR: That was the system, yeah, until after the union---until after I suggest to them that they should eliminate the coupon. When our new manager came, Mr. Senger, at that time I was managing the mill store. They transfer me to the branch store in New Mill [Camp]. They used to have a mill camp and they used to have a store there.

CP: Oh, so a smaller store than the plantation store?

AR: A smaller store. It was only a branch store to accommodate the people in New Mill.

CP: When you first started working you went out and took orders, yeah?

AR: I go out and take orders and deliver.

CP: Oh, did you have to walk?

AR: No, we used to have a truck, canopy truck where we load whatever we order and deliver with the truck.

CP: What kind of areas in Kōloa did you go to?

AR: Oh, I go to Japanese Camp and Filipino Camps like that, taking orders.

CP: And how many families would you have to canvas in a week time?

AR: Oh, there used to be a lot of them. I used to have over 250 single men, and we have to memorize all of their bango numbers. Imagine memorizing all that numbers. Two hundred and fifty bango numbers, and their bangos consist of about five digits. I could memorize them all because of the fact that if you are going to take orders and you ask them, "What is your bango number, now?" They don't like that.

"Oh, what's the matter with you? You long-time store boy and you don't know my number." So I had to memorize. (Laughs) So my head was full of numbers, that time. I also opened their own post office boxes at the same time.

CP: So you had 250 single men, but you sold to families, too, yeah?

AR: Yeah, I go to families, too. There were very few families, those days. In the Filipino Camp there were only about, let's see, four or five of them. The rest is single men. In the Japanese Camp is mostly families.

CP: And you visit everybody how often?

AR: Once a day.

CP: Once a day you visit everybody?

AR: Uh huh [yes]. I take order in afternoon and I deliver in the morning.

CP: How many people you visit in the morning altogether?

AR: All the camps.

CP: So you're talking about hundreds, then?

AR: Yeah. I take their orders, and then as soon as I go back to the store in the morning I make their orders. After I make all their orders, maybe after lunch I be able to deliver. After I deliver I go back to the store, then in the evening I go back, take their orders again. Going on like that like a routine.

CP: You deliver with the truck, yeah?

AR: Deliver with the truck, yeah.

CP: Did you have to load all the goods yourself?

AR: I load and unload, myself.

CP: So actually, that was a hard job, then.

AR: Hard job, yeah. So it no was easy job. (Laughs) It was going on like that for all these years.

CP: You'd try and visit everybody every day? And some days maybe they would order plenty, and some days they order less?

AR: Well, a new month, when you get the new month, that's when you got the big order. Sometime your truck (could not hold all the orders), sometimes, there were times when we borrow the plantation flatbed truck to deliver the new month order.

CP: What does that mean, "new month"?

AR: New month means, whatever they order today, they not going be collected on this paycheck. Only be collected the next paycheck. New month of the month.

CP: So they order plenty because they're not going to feel that taken out of their paycheck right away?

AR: Right.

CP: And what kind of things would you get orders for consistently?

AR: Oh, groceries, rice, whatever they needed for the house. Those days they used to buy rice by hundred-pound bag. A hundred-pound bag of rice it cost you about five dollars or five fifty or something like that. And those five dollars that they order is five days work, right? (Laughs) Dollar a day. Until the union.

CP: And you have to load the . . .

AR: I have to load 'em. Yeah, I load 'em and unload 'em. Well, I had good body those days, so (laughs) I could manage.

CP: Did you take the money when you delivered it?

AR: No, no, no. We don't collect.

CP: How do they pay?

AR: They collect it from their paycheck as I said.

CP: But if they wanted to go to the store, they could pay cash for something if they wanted to?

AR: They could if they want, if they have the cash, yeah.

CP: Would you say that most people paid that way, by credit off of their check?

AR: Most people was buying by coupons. And those Japanese families are charged on a regular charge slip. And they are not being collected in the office, they come and pay their bills. Not only Japanese, but the rest of the nationalities, whoever. Except Filipinos. Only Filipinos have been collected from the office. That's the discrimination. Until I suggested that they should abolish that.

And then when Mr. Senger came he came to ask me why I wanted coupon to be abolished. He was in favor of issuing coupons. He told me, "If I have the power, I'll put every customer on coupon." But he could not do that. Eventually they got rid of the coupon.

CP: When you started working at the store, how many other people worked in the store with you?

AR: Oh, many of us. There were three of us Filipinos, one Haole man, and several Japanese, mostly Japanese.

CP: How many of you were say store boys, taking the orders? How many of you were there?

AR: Oh, there were about. . . . Noki, Caesar, myself . . .

CP: Do you remember their names?

AR: Yeah. Noki Muranaka, Caesar Vasconcellos, Kazu Kunioka. . . .

CP: Kunioka.

AR: Yeah. Vicente Bargayo, Fidel Quiocho. . . . Then we had that old folks, [Ihei] Isoda, [Ryuichi] Kobayashi and [Yuhei] Sanekane.

CP: And they all worked (with you)?

AR: They used to go and take orders like me.

CP: Oh, plenty, then.

AR: Yeah, plenty of 'em. That's why the store was, well, in that case it was making money because they go and take orders. And then that style was abolished, you know, when the new manager came, he changed the policy of the store. Nobody go and take orders. They [customers] come in the store. Anyway, after the union was formed I think the stores slow down. That's when the store was not making money then.

CP: After 1946, then?

AR: Yeah. Then Mr. Senger came inside. Because I told him Mr. Nishihara get the wrong prices on it, you know. You have to get volume. Then when Mr. Senger came, as I said, we started to make sales, like that, he made money again. But he stayed only seven months in the store. Because, as I said, the contract was all verbal, and at that time the store was affiliated with Amfac Store, and that means that we had to buy most of our merchandise from Amfac. Amfac was selling to us wholesale. Then Amfac wrote him a letter telling him that he's not buying enough from Amfac. And he made the secretary write another letter in answer to that letter, telling Amfac where to get off. But then he was pressured by Amfac, because all his contract was verbal so nobody back him up. So eventually they pressure out him in seven months. But that year we made $10,000, the store made ten grand. And Mr. Cox took over. Howard Cox.

CP: What year was that? Was that about a year after Senger came?

AR: No, Mr. Senger lasted only for seven months. But he already made that much. So the credit of the making that money went to Mr. Cox. He continued for the year. (Laughs) Then they started to negotiate to sell that store because that store was not making money again after that. That's when Mr. Nishihara told me that the store there losing $10,000 a month.

That's when I start telling him that he must sell by volume, in order to make money. And he didn't believe me, and then the big shots, the executives of the Big Save Store came down. They was talking to him in the warehouse for oh, almost four hours. When they went home he came in the meat market, I was in the meat market. I was the meat cutter already. He said, "Alex, you know who these people are?"

"They are that Big Save executives, yeah?"

"Yeah, that's right," he said. "You know what they told me?"

"What they told you?"

"They was telling me about volume sales, exactly what you was telling me."

"Well, Mitsugi, I told you so. Now too late."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah."

(Laughter)

AR: So then they had the Līhu'e Plantation Store, too, managed by Mr. Cannon. Līhu'e Plantation wanted to buy it [Kōloa Plantation Store]. In fact, they were the first one to buy. So they came down, Mr. Cannon and his assistant manager, that Yamaguchi, I think.

CP: Mr. Cannon is from Līhu'e Plantation?

AR: Yeah. He was managing the Līhu'e Plantation Store. It's a Liberty House now.

CP: Oh, really?

AR: Yeah. But that used to be the Līhu'e Plantation Store. They came to that [Kōloa] Store and then his assistant manager came to me. He said, "Hey, what's the matter with you people here? This store supposed to be a gold mine." Because it's close to the bank and close to the post office.

I said, "Yeah, it is a gold mine, location is good, but not the way they running it."

"Oh, how are they running it?"

So I told him that they are running the store just like prewar days, you know, this and that. He said, "Oh, you cannot run it like that today."

"Well, that's how they're running it."

He said, "No wonder."

And so the next day Mr. Cannon came again. He came direct to me and he says, "I hear you're leaving us." Because I already applied for the mill, see.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Cannon. I think I get enough of your store life."

"Oh, but we need you," he says.

"I'm sorry. I already applied for the mill."

"Well, you should change your mind and stay with us for a while." He said, "We need you right now."

I said, "I'm sorry. I refuse to stay back."

He said, "Well, just in case you change your mind come and see me."

I said, "Thank you."

(Laughs) I was already applied back to the mill as a steam generator operator.

CP: Now at that time, Mr. Cox was the manager?

AR: Mr. Cox was the manager already. They were losing money already.

CP: And when you say that the store was being run the way it was done

during prewar times, how do you mean? You mentioned buying in volume, one thing.

AR: The prices was too high, and also since it's affiliated with Amfac, they start buying from Amfac again, see.

CP: Oh, I see. So they didn't have competitive bidding, then?

AR: No. And if you buy from Amfac, Amfac get 10 percent of whatever you sell. You pay them 10 percent. Besides buying the goods from them, you give them 10 percent of your sale, for Amfac. It's just like the travel.

CP: Why was that, that they kept that going between Amfac and the store?

AR: It was some kind of a contract, I think. Amfac and Grove Farm, they have a contract on the plantation.

CP: Before the war, you were saying that they only remodeled the store afterward, yeah?

AR: Well, they only remodeled the store when that new manager came.

CP: Oh, so the store stayed the same . . .

AR: The same, yeah.

CP: From when you started working [in 1933], all the way up until . . .

AR: Until that new manager came.

CP: How did it look, the old store?

AR: It's only one section where people come inside. They don't have to go anyplace around the store, if they want to buy bread the bread's right there. When it was remodeled, in order to buy one bread you had to go around the store. It's all different. Then they have only one cashier on the door. And before that there was no such thing as cashier, we wait on them and we charge. You come in the store and take your things and we charged it to you.

CP: Oh, each one of you would do that.

AR: Individually. There's no such thing as cashier at the store. When they remodeled the store then they created a cashier at the store. Only one [person] charging those things.

CP: And where in the store was the cashier?

AR: Right by the door. Before you go out, then you had to charge it or pay it like that. So one day I asked Mr. Senger, "Mr. Senger, the ladies here are complaining because when they want to buy bread, they have to go around the store to get the bread."

He tell me, "That was the idea, Alex. We call that impulse buying. They come in the store, they go to the bread, before there is the bread, they pick up something. Maybe after they buy the bread, before they go to the cashier they pick up something. That's impulse buying. That's why we put the bread up there." It was clever.

CP: Before that happened, before they remodeled the store how were things laid out in the store?

AR: Well, they have the dry goods department, then hardware department, and they have that grocery department. There were no meat [department] that time.

CP: Where did people get their meat from?

AR: Well, we have mostly frozen meat those days. Like sausages, and wieners, and all that, frozen, ready packaged one. There were no fresh meat until they remodel the store and created a meat market.

CP: Oh, when they remodeled the store did they make it bigger?

AR: Yes they did. They made it bigger. They had to add the meat [department]. And then they had to create the icebox and freezers, like that.

CP: Oh, and they didn't have that kind of stuff like that before?

AR: No, we didn't have. We used to have those standard icebox, small. But when they remodeled the store they created a regular cooler and regular freezer, big freezer. So they had to buy more machines and all that.

CP: Right. Now you mentioned something about you working at the New Mill Store. When did you start doing that?

AR: Well, I started working at the mill store when. . . . That was before when Senger came. When Mr. Senger came they called up Chester Furukawa, one of our clerks, too. He was managing the store. Then they took him out from there and bring him back to the main store and work as a regular clerk and they made me take his place.

CP: So actually during that whole time, you stayed pretty much in the main plantation store?

AR: Yeah.

CP: When did the New Mill Store open?

AR: Oh, that was long time. The mill store was already there when I first went to the mill. It was already there when I first came on the plantation.

CP: And it was smaller?

AR: Smaller. One small building.

CP: Where exactly was it located?

AR: Oh, right by the mill ground. But that ground now is all cane field. You see, because it was already in the camp there. I used to live in the [New Mill] Camp, after the war, you know. And then the plantation wanted to make that thing to a field, so they started telling the people to move out from that camp. So all those mill people, Japanese families living in that camp are all around Kōloa side, now.

CP: Since you worked in [1933] up until 1960 did you always do the same job?

AR: Right.

CP: Always take orders, always deliver?

AR: Yeah.

CP: When you came back from the war, did they just save your job for you?

AR: Yeah, because it was something like a law, those days. That when you are drafted in the army they cannot give your job to anybody else. You go back to your own job.

CP: When did you decide to go back to the mill as a steam generator operator?

AR: When they started to give us notice that they're going to sell the store, I went to see Mr. [William M.] Moragne, [Sr.]. At that time Mr. Moragne was the plantation manager [between 1953-1969], and I asked him if he can return me to the plantation. He tell me, "Yes, go back where you are training." Because before then I applied for--I wanted to get out from the store--I applied for that steam generator operator and I got accepted by [taking] a test. There were about fifteen of us applied for the same job and they give written test. So I passed the test, the rest didn't pass it. So I got the job as the steam generator operator.

And then I stayed steam generator operator for a couple of years. Well, the contract was kind of funny, too, because the contract is that I supposed to train for four years as a trainee on that steam generator. But then our mill superintendent was Fred Hebert, he didn't like me too much I think. While I was training, he asked me, "Alex, after you train here, where you going to work?"

"I don't know, Mr. Moragne told me to stay here."

"Oh, but we don't have no vacancy here. After your training you have to go back to your old job," he tell me. And my old job at that time was that I was supposed to be a truck driver.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CP: Okay, we were asking about when you had just left the store, and . . .

AR: Went to the mill?

CP: You went to the mill.

AR: Yeah, that was late already. It was probably in the '60s. So I went back in the mill, and then as I said, that superintendent didn't like me too much I think.

CP: Who was that?

AR: Fred Hebert. I used to play tennis with him.

I was supposed to train for four years, but then the regular operator got sick, he went to Mahelona [Hospital]. So I trained only for a couple of weeks, and they made me operate solo. And I operated solo for a month, then the supervisor came to me and tells me that Mr. Hebert says your training days is over. You are a regular operator now. Oh, okay with me because then I was grade six as a trainee, and when they told me I was over as a trainee, they had to give me grade eight. So I said, "That's all right with me." So I operated. So when that fellow came back from Mahelona, that means I have to go out from there because that was not my regular job, so they released me from the job.

But then the assistant engineer, [Masato] "Mac" Inouye wanted me to stay back in the mill. He asked me, "Why don't you stay with us in the shop?" At the same time our engineer [between 1954-1968] was Mr. Vic Vargas, a Filipino man. He asked me if I wanted to go to school.

I said, "What kind schooling?"

He said, "You go learn welding."

I said, "Yeah, I go." So the plantation organized several boys to go to that welding school. It was during the nights after work. And that's when we become welders. Then I was only grade four, that time, so they gave me a job title as a grade five utility welder after that. Then the trade progression came. All tradesmen grade five and up have to go and take trade progression. And you pass that, then you advance every six month to another grade until you go

to the top grade, grade nine. So I passed that again. I came grade nine welder, that's already a journeyman.

CP: How long did you go to that school?

AR: Oh, it's only forty-eight hours. Because they train you how to weld and all that, you know.

CP: How long over a period, how many times a week did you go?

AR: We go about, we spend only a couple hours a night.

CP: Every night?

AR: Yeah. After we come out from the mill.

CP: So you went from grade five to grade nine. How long did it take you to get there?

AR: Every six months after that. After you pass the test, every six months. Automatically they promote you.

CP: So you have to take a test every time?

AR: You have to get your test every time, yeah. At that time about, oh, over fifty guys was taking the test in one building, and one Haole man from Honolulu came to give us the test. I was the first one to come out from the room, because the Haole man noticed I was doing nothing. He came to me, he said, "You finished yours?"

I said, "Yeah, I finished mine."

"Well, you either stay back or go out from the room, wait outside."

So I went out just to go outside. Then about ten minutes later a Portuguese boy came out. I couldn't remember who that Portuguese boy was. Then the rest of them take the whole time up. A week later the superintendent in the mill came to see me. He says, "Alex, did you know your test result from that trade progression?"

I already knew because I already called our personnel director, Mr. [Fred] Weber. So I pretended I didn't know because he the type that like to be the head man. I said, "No, sir, I didn't hear anything about it."

"Well, according to your test you will be eligible to be supervisor one of these days. But right now we promote you to grade six."

I tell him, "Thank you." (Laughs) That's how it was. Then every six months I get that upgrading.

CP: So finally, when you retired you were a grade nine?

AR: Grade nine, yeah. I was supposed to be a journeyman welder already.

CP: What did you do as a welder?

AR: Well, at that time, the plantation wanted to change the washer where the cane goes and then create that flume where the cane being washed. And Mr. Moragne did not believe in contracting, he wanted us to do it. Everything is just like the shop boys and the carpenters do all that whatever improvement in the mill. And Vic Vargas make the drawing. Mr. Moragne was also a technical engineer, mechanical engineer just like Mr. Vargas. So the two engineers formulated that, made up that washer that they have in the mill now. And we fabricated the whole thing. We fabricated all and we made the rollers, everything that went in there is fabricated by us.

CP: How many people did you work with?

AR: Oh, there was a lot of us. In the carpenter shop there're about, oh, about a dozen of them, and all the mill shop boys, machinists, welders, plumbers, all connect.

CP: This washer, what was it made out of?

AR: Steel. Steel and pipes, like that. They have a mud bath where the cane fall in the mud bath. And then they have a sprayer where the cane pass there, and they have drums where they can stir the cane before it falls to the carrier that is going to the mill.

CP: So actually this washer is not just one thing, but it's like a series of . . .

AR: No, series of . . .

CP: Functions.

AR: Yeah, carriers. And Mr. Vic Vargas was so clever that when the truck dumped the cane in the first room, it's all automatic into the mill. All automation. He made the mill automation. He was very clever, because all the plantations, Līhu'e Plantation wanted to take him, Kekaha Plantation wanted to take him, and McBryde wanted to take him, South American plantation wanted to take him. He was that good. Filipino man. But he chose to stay in Kōloa. Then [Lyle] Van Dreser, the assistant manager, did not like him too much. But then the president of Grove Farm told them not to touch him. (Laughs)

CP: This Vic Vargas, is he still around today, or did he pass on?

AR: He's in Honolulu. [See page 152 for Vargas' interview.]

CP: Was he younger or older than you guys?

AR: Oh, he's older. He's a very good engineer.

CP: Actually you had a pretty big responsibility, then, as a welder. I mean because that was a fairly important function at the mill.

AR: Well, many was welders, so all we had to do is be given a drawing, and we weld that thing. That's all the responsibility we have.

CP: Where did you get the raw materials from?

AR: [Grove Farm] Plantation. Plantation order all the materials. All we do is to weld. Welding rods, machines, and all that is all plantation owned.

CP: So how many years were you a welder altogether?

AR: Oh, it was really long time, because after they sold the store, then I become a welder.

CP: And then you stayed a welder until you retired?

AR: I retired as a welder.

CP: That was 1978, yeah?

AR: Yeah.

CP: Would you say that that was a better job than the store job, or . . .

AR: Well, I wouldn't say it's a better job physically. But money wise it's better. Because in the store I was only grade four. And if you work in the store, a grade four outside makes more money than the grade four in the store. I don't know why. The same plantation. So money wise I make better. As I say, when I was working in the store I had a debt until my neck. (Laughs) And I went to work in the mill, then I started to come up from that hole. That's when I was able to make this house and all that.

Anyway, when I was working in the store we used to have a, you know when we have that inventory? There was a office manager, Mr. [A. Hebard] Case. That man when he come in the store, because we are under the plantation, see, he come in the store, he kept playing with his cigar, and he's just like one god. He don't say good morning or hello to anybody, even if you beg him. And Caesar Vasconcellos, one of the clerks, is mad with him because they used to play soccer together, with this man, and yet when he come in the store he don't tell him, "Hello, Caesar. How are you?" He just walk around just like he doesn't know nobody.

Then one inventory day I was taking the drug department, you know--it was a funny thing--and Dick Tong and Mr. Case was watching us take the inventory. He was playing with his cigar and Dick Tong was standing beside him. Dick is one of the office workers. And I read---I picked up medicine bottle, whatever drug, and I tell the

name to the bookkeeper, Jiro [Kunioka], and he write down and he put the cost and all da kine. You know the drugs like that, some of them are medically written. So I pick up one bottle and I says, "Jiro, I'm going to spell this to you because I cannot read."

Mr. Case come. (Laughs) He said, "Give me that." So he look at the bottle, he's not a doctor, so he cannot read, too. It was written in medical as I said. So he said, "Here Jiro." He give the bottle to Jiro. He did that to me three times in that day. And three times he did that to me and three days he couldn't read. So he walk away.

When walk away I tell Jiro, "Jiro, you know that man went to college? I didn't go to college. What I cannot read, he cannot read." (Laughs)

So Jiro say, "Yeah, that's right, no."

You know after that, that man was very friendly to me, Mr. Case. He come in the store, as soon as he come in the store, he come in the meat market. He tell me, "Good morning, Alex."

"Good morning, sir. How are you today?"

"Oh, fine."

Every time he come in the store he come and greet me. I'm the only one he does.

So then they started to sell the homes where we are living. So I went to the office and I asked Mr. Weber, "Mr. Weber, how much are you folks selling my place?"

"Oh, Alex, you want to buy your place?"

I said, "I would like to if I can afford it."

Just then Mr. Case came inside. "Oh, Alex, good morning."

"Good morning, sir."

Then Mr. Weber told him, "Alex want to buy his place."

"Oh, you want to buy your place, Alex?"

"Oh, I would like to if I could afford that."

"Your place get a house, yeah?" he said. Because the house was, you know that house out there (points to older building next to present residence)? That was the house here.

"Yes, I would like to," I said.

"But your place have a house," he said.

"House? What house?"

"Don't your place have a house?"

"Oh, I don't know if you call that house, only termite holding each other." It's a very old house, you know.

He laugh, he said, "We still call it a house. I fix you up. No worry," he said. "Wait." So he went back in his office. And he came out and quoted me $1800. I was surprised, I didn't expect that low.

I said, "Eighteen hundred?"

"Yeah. Is it too high?"

"No, no, no. If you say it's $1800, $1800 it is. I'll buy it."

"Okay, we make it $1800."

CP: That's for the lot?

AR: For the lot and the house. So nobody believe it. When they was moving the stone wall toward the house because they re-surveyed this place and the boundary goes about one yard out to the road. So they was moving the stone wall and this vegetable peddler, Higa from Kalaheo, saw me moving the stone wall and he stopped. "Why you moving the stone wall?"

"Oh, the boundary is over here."

"Oh, you bought this place?"

I said, "I <u>wen</u> bought it."

"How much you bought it?"

"I give you five guesses, Higa."

Then he came up with $7500. Too high. He keep on guessing until he came down to $5000. It still is too high.

"How much you bought it?"

"Eighteen hundred."

He told me, "Nah."

"Yeah."

"You know what you do? Don't move that stone wall, leave 'em as it

is. You sell 'em for $7500." (Laughs)

CP: So did you do that?

AR: Hell, no. I moved that stone wall and build this house, you know. And I moved that house, there. I moved that house myself.

CP: Really?

AR: Yeah, because that Portuguese man that used to move houses, he was a Kaua'i Electric lineman. He was moving all the houses that year. There were so many houses to be moved. I asked him to move it. He said, "Yeah, okay."

So he bring all his materials over here. But he don't seem to come and move it. I called him up. I said, "Hey, Joe. When you going to move my house?"

That bugger just bought one boat and he was going fishing every day. Said, "Oh, Alex, I'm so busy," he says. "Why don't you move 'em yourself?"

"How can I move it, I have no materials?"

"Oh, get all materials over there. Why don't you use 'em?"

I said, "I can use it?"

He said, "Yeah." So I moved that. (Laughs)

CP: What year was that that you bought this house?

AR: Ah, that was about. . . . Long time ago, it was about going to twenty years, now, you know.

CP: Sixty-seven maybe, sixty-six?

AR: Yeah, that one.

CP: And before that, where were you living at?

AR: In that house. That house, that building out over there (points outside) was sitting where my swimming pool is. Until I decided to build this.

CP: When you lived there, were you just renting?

AR: I was renting it from the plantation until I bought it.

CP: How long were you living there under the renting agreement?

AR: I was living there for about, let's say about five years, I think I was renting that thing, until they decided to sell it. Sold all the

homes over here. Plantation decided to get away from that renting business.

CP: After the war where did you live?

AR: I was living in the mill first. Mill Camp.

CP: Renting, too?

AR: Renting an old plantation home in the Mill [Camp]. Then the plantation decided to get rid of that camp, and they start telling the people to move out. And the people have been moving all outside, one by one, until we almost were the last ones to move there because my wife didn't like the idea of going toilet outside. Because all the Kōloa homes, those days, you have to go outside toilet. Call it pit toilet, pit system. Boxes like that. So we told 'em, "Oh, if I cannot find a house where we can have our toilet inside the house, we refuse to move." We was really giving him a rough time. (Laughs)

Our personnel director and carpenter boss used to go and see her. "When we going move? When we going move?"

Tell, "We don't want to move, we don't know what house to go, you know."

And then one day they call me at the plantation office. Mr. Weber called me, "Alex, I heard you looking for a house."

"Who, me? Looking for a house?" I said. And then I think back and I said, "Yeah, that's right."

He said, "Well, there is a house down in Kōloa we are renovating, we just finished renovating it. And you can go and take a look. Tell your wife to go and take a look at the house. If you like the house, then you can live there." That was the house. They renovated it, they made toilet inside, and dig another new cesspool, and all that, you know.

So I came to see it, and I told them, "Yeah, I like to live there." So they gave me the key. They supplied me the truck that I need for move. Because they claimed that they moving me so they supply me the truck.

CP: So the Mill Camp, how long did you stay there?

AR: I was staying there long before the war.

CP: So you had the same house even, when you came. Before and after the war?

AR: I went back to the home, to the home, yeah.

CP: So you stayed there till. . . .

AR: Until they move us down here.

CP: And that was, what, 1959?

AR: Yeah, around that, '59, '60, '67 already. But that camp now is only---that camp is not there anymore, only cane field.

END OF INTERVIEW

KŌLOA: An Oral History of a Kaua'i Community

VOLUME I

Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SEPTEMBER 1988